

VZCZCXRO2329

PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHW #2415/01 3211500

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 171500Z NOV 06

FM AMEMBASSY WARSAW

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2457

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHKW/AMCONSUL KRAKOW PRIORITY 1403

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 002415

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2021

TAGS: PREL PGOV PL

SUBJECT: TOUGH TIMES FOR THE LEAGUE OF POLISH FAMILIES

REF: WARSAW 2389

WARSAW 00002415 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary T. Curtin for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Only six months after joining the ruling Polish government coalition, the ultra-Catholic League of Polish Families (LPR) was the big loser in last weekend's regional elections, and faces an uncertain future. Party leader Roman Giertych has been a lightning rod for criticism, and his efforts to infuse LPR with a new generation of leaders from the party's youth arm, All Poland Youth (MW), have flopped. Many of the party's core constituents, deeply Catholic, elderly Poles who live in rural "Polska B," have turned to the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party. More than one-third of LPR's Parliamentary caucus come from the All Poland Youth, some of whose members' track record of virulently anti-Semitic and homophobic comments have colored negatively the view of many Poles towards LPR and Giertych, personally. End Summary.

¶2. (C) When Jaroslaw Kaczynski brokered the coalition deal that brought LPR and nationalist Samoobrona (SO) into national government, many Poles expressed distinct displeasure at the elevation of LPR's Roman Giertych to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education. Giertych consistently polls as the least popular and least trusted politician in Poland. His tenure as Minister of Education has been controversial, including relaxing standards for passing the Polish baccalaureate, backsliding on Holocaust-education funding, and promotion of "patriotic education" closely tailored to LPR's vision of Polish nationalism imbued with Catholic values. Even close Kaczynski allies, including Minister of Interior Ludwic Dorn, have expressed concern over Giertych. Small scale protests against Giertych have become commonplace among school age children, especially teenagers, whose educational course Giertych is charged with charting.

All in the Family

¶3. (C) Giertych's association with nationalist and Catholic politics is a family affair. His grandfather Jedrzej formed All Poland Youth in 1922, closely aligning the organization with Polish nationalist Roman Dmowski. All Poland Youth became the largest student organization in the interwar period, and actively promoted anti-Semitic policies, including Jewish boycotts and restricting Jews' access to higher education. After World War II, Jedrzej lived in exile in London, where he was expelled from the emigrants' political party for his anti-Semitic views. Giertych's father, Maciej, a European Parliamentarian, is an outspoken advocate of extremely conservative Catholic values and critic of teaching evolution in schools. Maciej caused a stir in

July 2006 when he praised Spain's former fascist leaders, lamenting that Europe lacked such statesmen today. He is also widely viewed as having been supportive of the anti-Semitic campaign following the 1968 University strikes, warning of Jewish and Communist complicity.

¶4. (C) Giertych himself has been studiously silent on the issue of anti-Semitism. And while not visiting the sins of the father and grandfather on the son and grandson, Giertych's efforts to reestablish a student youth movement bearing the same name as his grandfather's anti-Semitic predecessor sent an unmistakable message to history-conscious Poles. Moreover, Giertych makes little effort to walk back outrageous statements made by members of the All Poland Youth. His protege, Piotr Farfal continues in his position as deputy chairman of the public television (TVP) despite revelations that he worked for a neo-Nazi publication for three years. In one article for the racist publication "Front," Farfal wrote an article entitled "Why Be a Skinhead," that stated "harsh repression against Jews is necessary if our nation wishes to develop independently and healthily. It is time we ride ourselves totally of the Jews...Poles bribed by Jewish money and selling to the Jews deserve not only our contempt but also severe punishment. Our cause is holy. Jews out of Poland!"

¶5. (U) Giertych similarly has made little effort to restrain another colleague, Wojciech Wierzejski, former head of MW and one of ten All Poland Youth elected to the Polish Parliament in 2005 (over one-third of LPR's current parliamentary caucus of 29). In connection with the 2006 annual gay rights parade in Warsaw, Wierzejski said that "if deviants start to demonstrate, they should be beaten with batons. Once they feel the pain, they won't come again because gays are by definition cowards." But Wierzejski's homophobic notoriety has not translated into electoral success. He ran as LPR's candidate for mayor of Warsaw, and last week finished behind

WARSAW 00002415 002.2 OF 002

the joke candidate from the "Gnomes and Bumpkins" party. Commenting on his poor finish, Wierzejski blamed the quality of voters in Warsaw.

From Mohair Beret to Mohawk: A Failed Strategy

¶6. (C) Giertych's efforts to infuse a new spirit into LPR by highlighting the All-Poland Youth have largely failed. LPR was viewed as the biggest loser in regional elections held on November 12, finishing behind all other major parties. LPR support fell below five percent overall, the minimum threshold for representation at town council, city council and regional assemblies alike. However, it was not entirely shut out, gaining over five percent of the vote in some (mostly rural) areas to ensure representation on some regional, city, and town councils. In presidential and parliamentary races in 2001 and 2005, LPR consistently polled just below eight percent. Its best result was in the 2004 EU elections, when its highly motivated, anti-EU voters delivered nearly sixteen percent of the vote, winning ten of Poland's 54 EU parliamentary seats. Giertych's efforts, starting in 2005, to put a new face on LPR by promoting colleagues from All Poland Youth has not worked. Numerous long-time members left the party, and many voters deserted to PiS. More recently, six LPR deputies defected from the LPR caucus to join the "National Peasant's Caucus" in September, when Poland's governing coalition was threatened with disintegration. Giertych, however, may have learned his lesson. On November 16, the LPR caucus elected Janusz Dobrosz as their new deputy speaker of the Sejm, replacing Marek Kotlinowski, who was elected to the Constitutional Court. Dobrosz, 54, joined LPR in 2003 after leaving the Polish Peasants Party, and thus is part of LPR's (literal and figurative) "old guard," compared to his All Poland Youth colleagues.

¶7. (C) Another reason for LPR's increasingly dismal showing was the 2005 switch in allegiance of ultra-Catholic (and frequently anti-Semitic) Radio Maryja. Long an LPR advocate, Radio Maryja's controversial chief, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, abruptly changed horses in 2005, when he urged listeners to support the Law and Justice party (PiS). Radio Maryja listeners, sometimes referred to as "Mohair Berets" owing to their choice of hats, are the backbone of rural "Polska B," and had been the (predominantly older and female) core of LPR's constituency. Disgruntled by Giertych's promotion of the youth wing and wooed by PiS, many have deserted Giertych. Radio Maryja continues to urge its listeners to support PiS and not LPR, fitting into PiS's plan to "devour" its smaller coalition partners by wooing their voters. The Israeli Ambassador told the Charge on November 15 that President Kaczynski said that "Radio Maryja listeners vote for PiS. We don't want them to vote for anyone else."

¶8. (C) Comment: A November 17 press report that Giertych will shift tactics again by making older LPR members, rather than the brash, young All Poland Youth leaders, its public face, suggests he is trying to plot LPR's recovery or at least its survival. If it cannot improve its position, it will not win any seats in the next parliamentary elections. But it faces a challenge. PiS effectively has adopted the same nationalist and Catholic rhetoric (without anti-Semitism), and in doing so has managed to peel away LPR's core support. But PiS still needs LPR and its deputies to maintain its slender hold on a parliamentary majority, and we do not expect Giertych, who is only 35, to disappear. Like SO's Andrzej Lepper, his "outlander" status is part of his appeal to some voters, and he remains a suave and media savvy politician. Polish government officials are simultaneously troubled by some of his more extreme views (not to mention the views expressed by All Poland Youth members), and aware that they need LPR--at least for now.

End Comment.

HILLAS